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12

17 March 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: A Proposal for Increasing Viet Cong
Defections

1. The rate at which the Viet Cong have surrendered in January and February of 1967 is running 65 percent higher than that of the first two months of 1966. Tet, the Vietnamese New Year celebration, falls in this period. In the past, large numbers of both government and enemy personnel have taken advantage of the traditional Tet visits to their families as an opportunity to desert, go AWOL or over-stay their leaves. But this year, the marked upsurge in the number of Viet Cong who have formally rallied to the government through the Chieu Hoi system, reveals two major causal factors. The high defection rate is obviously a direct reflection of the erosion in morale and the worsening conditions which the Viet Cong have experienced in the year that has elapsed since Tet 1966. As Allied and GVN pressure increases and expands, this attitude of personal defeat and loss of will to continue will become more widespread in Communist military and political ranks of the enemy causing the Communists internal problems. But since people are the essence of this war, negative attitudes are insufficient for victory. There must be a demonstrable crossing of the line, a cessation of active support for the enemy and at least an implied political acceptance of the Saigon government.

2. Defection is a personal act, and this raises the second factor underlying the recent step-up in the Chieu Hoi rate. The Tet truce removed the most immediate, and probably most important, barrier to defection. It enabled individual VC to leave their units openly, with the blessings of their commanders and without the fear that is present, at any other time of the year, that such an act could mean death. During the past ten months captured documents and prisoner interrogations have shown that the prevention of desertion has become a major enemy

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pre-occupation. In April 1965 a captured document, essentially a primer on how to spot incipient defections, revealed that the VC was willing, that early, to chance the psychological losses that the admission of the seriousness of the problem might cause, in an effort to stem this rising tide. Security restrictions will become increasingly severe and will dissuade many from straying whose decision, given the overall climate of defeat, might otherwise be to give up the fight. The major impediment to an even greater disintegration of the Viet Cong organization in the months ahead will be the very real, individual fear of immediate VC reprisal. The improvements in the national administration of the Chieu Hoi program, the addition of a host of new defection inducements are actually less important than getting the individual VC to lay down his gun and take the first step away from his unit. Advice on how and when to leave the VC, and a believable guarantee of safe escort out of the zone of retribution would be the most incisive blow we could strike in the exploitation of the breakdown in morale.

3. With 1,100 ralliers now being processed through the Chieu Hoi machinery weekly, we have that many successful case histories to cull to determine, pragmatically, how security restrictions can be circumvented. And in that number we also have the source of talent for a program that will enable us to aggressively engineer more defections. Experience with the few armed Chieu Hoi teams that were created on the model of the People's Action Teams showed that, when properly re-motivated, they were highly effective, zealous workers in the GVN cause.

4. We propose that under the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi, teams of five to six ex-VC with political and military experience be formed, trained and posted to populous districts where Allied/GVN military actions are planned or where Revolutionary Development programs are being expanded. Actual utilization of the teams would vary from province to province, but when assigned to combat units as a psywar adjunct they would have access to prisoner interrogations to assess, on the spot, the status of the enemy units' morale and the potential for large-scale defections at squad and platoon level. They

could inventory the internal frictions, personnel and disciplinary problems which could be exacerbated later by tailored propaganda and determine as well the identities of those others most likely to defect to whom personal appeals then could be made.

5. With the entry of RD teams into new hamlets, ex-VC Chieu Hoi teams, preferably ones native to that area, would make initial appeals to the inhabitants to contact their VC relations and encourage them to desert the lost cause. During their stay in a hamlet, these teams could actually provide a confidential counselling service on modes of contact and escape. Citing their own experiences they could offer their assistance to any VC willing to defect--providing him the bridge to the nearest secure reception point. If the control and utilization of such teams were properly coordinated with province and district officials (particularly with an expanded provincial constabulary structure), the teams could provide the contact instrument through which secure defections were arranged.

6. No single program or technique is going to crack the Viet Cong organization, but in the pool of ex-VC who have already defected we have an unutilized resource which, if properly exploited, could produce dramatic results.